

An episode of "Friday Night Lights" showed the football coach of the Dillon Panthers, who also happens to be the school's athletic director, scrambling to find someone to cheaply run the girls volleyball team. He settled on his wife, Tami, who complains strenuously about the lack of funding her sport gets compared to the well-heeled boys.

Sadly, the TV show reality is a reflection of the continued double-standard that many girls contend with at high schools from coast to coast. At large schools and small ones, rural ones and urban ones, girls who want to play a team sport are often faced with fewer opportunities than boys. And it isn't supposed to be that way. In fact, it was 37 years ago this month that Title IX went into effect -- making it law that girls must get the same opportunities to play sports as boys.

Title IX was hailed as a landmark piece of legislation; supporters, including myself, hoped it would pave the way for a new world of opportunities for women in high school and college. Thankfully, the situation in college has become much better. There are options for women at universities that did not exist a generation ago. But high school remains a problem, where women are still highly underrepresented in school sports. Girls make up half of the high school population, yet receive only 41 percent of all athletic participation opportunities. This translates to 1.3 million fewer opportunities for young women to play high school sports than young men, according to statistics compiled by the Women's Sports Foundation. Worse still, this gap is actually increasing. The benefits of sports The benefits of participation in athletics are clear. Studies show that student athletes graduate at higher rates, perform better in school and are less likely to use drugs and alcohol. While adolescent females are twice as likely to suffer from depression, studies have proven that athletic females have higher confidence, better self-images, and lower levels of depression -- critical attributes that help them succeed throughout their lives. And a majority of women identified as key leaders in Fortune 500 companies participated in sports, as did executive business women.

Sports brings with it confidence and camaraderie among young women, giving them memories and friends that will last a lifetime. Yet those benefits are lost if schools never offer girls the choice to play. Under current law, high schools are not required to disclose any data on equity in sports, making it difficult for high schools, parents and other watchdogs to ensure fairness in their athletics programs. Colleges and universities do a much better job of this, and generally offer more comparable programs.

Last week I introduced a simple piece of legislation that I hope will help fix this issue. My bill, the

High School Athletics Accountability Act of 2009 (HR 2882), requires that high schools report basic data on the number of female and male students in their athletic programs as well as the expenditures made for their sports teams. This transparency ought to go a long way in making school districts accountable, and will help local communities. We must give our schools the tools they need to identify inequities in their sports programs, so that current and future generations of women can enjoy the benefits of athletics. We must continue to protect the rights our nation's young women deserve. And we need to reaffirm our commitment to equality -- whether it's in the workplace, in the classroom or on the volleyball court.

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